



# SIERRA CLUB

*Connecticut Chapter*  
*P.O. Box 270595*  
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## **Testimony Before the Environment Committee March 14, 2022**

Dear Environment Committee Chairs Cohen and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Slap and Palm, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and distinguished members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Sierra Club and our more than 40,000 members and supporters in Connecticut, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on several bills before you today.

The Sierra Club is committed to defending everyone's right to a healthy world by tackling the serious challenges of a warming climate, unprecedented levels of pollution, the waste management crisis, biodiversity loss, and the dangers of toxics. Fossil fuels are the main driver of climate change as well as unhealthy air, and therefore our most powerful tool to address both is to create a rapid and equitable transition away from fossil fuels to clean and renewable energy across all sectors of our economy. Plastic is contributing to the climate crisis and, along with hard to recycle materials, the waste management crisis. The climate crisis, pollution, toxic chemicals, overharvesting, and loss of habitat are threatening the biodiversity of the state and our planet. Toxics are also threatening the health and well-being of our residents, particularly children.

We must do much, much more than has been done to date to address these issues with real solutions.

### **HB- 5294 AN ACT CONCERNING THE INTENTIONAL RELEASE OF CERTAIN BALLOONS.**

Sierra Club supports HB 5294 with some recommendations. The amount of plastic that contaminates our land and waterways is extremely concerning. It is a threat to our wildlife and ecosystems, and to the health of our citizens. The production of plastic items contributes greatly to greenhouse gas emissions that are warming our atmosphere and causing the climate crisis that is already upon us. Helium balloons pollute our environment and endanger wildlife. Helium balloons, their strings and ties often end up snaring birds or aquatic wildlife, or get swallowed when the animals mistake the latex or foil for food. They do not biodegrade and instead break up into microplastics. Releasing them into the atmosphere is dangerous and unnecessary. We recommend amending this bill to include a total prohibition on the release of helium balloons and recommend a public education component at the point of sale to inform consumers about the policy and their responsibilities under the law. It should not be allowed.

### **HB 5297- AN ACT CONCERNING THE MULTIPLICITY OF AFFECTING FACILITIES IN CERTAIN CENSUS BLOCK GROUPS IN THE STATE**

Sierra Club appreciates the committee's raising a bill that could potentially begin the process of strengthening the environmental justice law in the state. In updating Connecticut's Environmental Justice law, the process must include, and be driven by, people living and working in environmental justice communities. The majority of polluting facilities in the state<sup>1</sup> are

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<https://ctdeep.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=7783574e2cd94d388124b54cdb82a34e>



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located in environmental justice communities, polluting the air, land and water there and contributing to respiratory diseases, increased risk of cancers and other health concerns. These communities continue to be subject to siting and permitting of polluting facilities despite already being overburdened with pollution. This grave injustice must end and DEEP and the legislature must do more to protect vulnerable communities.

In 2020, New Jersey passed an environmental justice law<sup>2</sup> requiring the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to reject permits in already overburdened communities. This law could be a blueprint for Connecticut to prevent additional stressors on the already overburdened EJ communities in our state.

Some important definitions from the New Jersey law that Connecticut should consider:

Overburdened communities is defined as:

1. At least 35 percent of the households qualify as low-income households
2. At least 40 percent of the residents identify as minority or members of a state recognized tribal community; or,
3. At least 40 percent of the households have limited English proficiency

The law requires NJ DEP to evaluate the environmental and public health impacts of the following facilities:

1. Major sources of air pollution (i.e., gas fired power plants and cogeneration facilities)
2. Resource recovery facilities or incinerators; sludge processing facilities
3. Sewage Treatment plants with a capacity of more than 50 million gallons per day
4. Transfer station or solid waste facilities
5. Recycling facilities that receive at least 100 tons of recyclable material per day
6. Scrap metal facilities
7. Landfills or
8. Medical waste incinerators, except those attendant to hospitals and universities

We hope as the process moves forward, you will consider the recommendations in our testimony.

## **SB 244- AN ACT CONCERNING WILDLIFE THAT CAUSES DAMAGE TO LIVESTOCK, POULTRY OR BEES.**

Sierra Club Connecticut opposes SB 244 on several grounds. This bill would open the door to unregulated hunting of wildlife under the window of protecting crops and livestock. It could create a public safety hazard because of the potential backyard hunting. It will not solve any of the perceived problems, and would allow 24/7 hunting of bears, bobcats and other wildlife. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection already has the statutory authority to take wildlife, this bill is unnecessary and potentially dangerous.

Black bears and other wildlife are crucial to the forest ecosystem. They help regulate insect populations, disperse seeds, open canopies, and amend soils. We should be very careful about implementing this legislation. Studies have shown time and again that it is food availability, not bear population numbers, that cause most negative human-bear interactions.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nj.gov/dep/ej/docs/ej-law.pdf>



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Proper public education does more to reduce these negative interactions than hunting ever would. If wildlife has a consistent source of food (like garbage or bird seed), it will continue to visit that place. Removing these attractants from property will keep them away. Tactics such as these go a long way in reducing interactions in general, therefore minimizing negative ones. Teaching people how to properly interact with bears and our wildlife population is the solution, not hunting.

There are already laws on the books regarding problem wildlife. Any wildlife that damages or destroys property or is threatening to humans is removed from the area and destroyed. We ask you to reject this bill.

Thank you for consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

Ann Gadwah, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer  
Sierra Club Connecticut